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THE MAN WITH THE MASK.

A Play In One Act

By

Mrs Ivar Levinsohn.

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Characters:

Mr Pembrooke.

Mrs Pembrooke.

Bill.

Scene:

Sitting room in Pembrook's house, in the heart of the countryside.

(The curtain rises. Mrs. P. enters by door supposed to lead from her child's room. She walks back a step.

Mrs P. Now, darling, don't fight sleep any longer. your father will not be home for hours, so shut your little eyes tight and go to sleep. She walks a step away from door, then turns as if child had called her. Leave the door open a little? Very well, dear. But mind, you must go to sleep.

She crosses room to window. What an awful night Sue picked to be out in, and I am sure here by the door too. What noise the rain drive through the trees. She turns and looks out the window, as if in deep thought. Yes, I'll leave it open a little. I wonder if he is. How dark. How the (illegible) sounds, and the more so, when it rises a little crescendo as if it were— and subsides. She shivers, pulls her coat over her head, and looks into the child's room. Why, Vivian, You're still awake. You should be fast asleep by this time. Well, I don't like to let you in the habit, but I'll please you just this once. She goes in.

A few seconds of silence. A figure appears at the window. He opens the latter. Pembler's window is left open, and finally the door in opening it. He climbs in, and closes window after him.

Bill. Look around room. I thought these people had a swell home.

But dey aint. I s'pose dey made people believe dey were richer t han they really was. Gee, but dere a nice fire anyway, and a fire feels good ter night . He goes over to warm his hands. If I'd stayed out on that porch a few minutes more I'd been as stiff as Joe Henderson is now ,and I aint flirt in, wit h de undertaker just yet, not before dis job is done. Don't to much in it. As he warms his hands he looks into fire. After dis job is done, I'll never quit.I'll never try ter be honest again. He sneers. Honest again. I wonder if I could. A sound is heard. Someone's coming. He hides behind curtains. Enter Mrs P. Mrs P. Poor little girl, she couldn't sleep because she was anxious about her father. I scarcely blame her, it is such an awful night , and it is so late. I am beginning to feel a little anxious myself. She turns round, rmmd surprised. Why, the shutters are open. She runs over to window, tries to raise it it works easily. The window has been pried open. A look of terror spreads over her face. My God, a thief must be in the house, and we are alone, Mary and I. She stands gazing wildly about room. Oh, what shall I do. There's no use crying for help, no one will hear me. She rows terror stricken to large chair, and grasps it for support, then with an effort: I must go to my baby, I must try to save her at any cost.

As she is about to walk to door the burglar comes from behind draperies. Mrs P. looks at him, stares, and is about to fall ,then with a struggle for will power regains her strengtth

Mrs P. You will not hurt my child, will you?

Bill No, and I won't hurt you, if you got any brains. She is trembling with fear. Stop yer shakin, and I'll tell you

what I came fer. She looks at him ,full of fear and wonder. I heerd yer say yer husband had a nine mile drive before him well, den yer know where he is. Joe Henderson's dead.

Mrs P. gasps. Dead. How do you know?

Bill Me pal puts me wise. He's dead, and your husband is what dey calls de guardian over de kid.

Mrs P. wit h mingled horror and surprise. My husband guardian?

Bill. Only over de kid. I'm de guardian over all her money.

Mrs P. Why, why, what do you mean?

Bill. Don't stand dere lookin as if yere goin ter eat me up, and I'll tell you all about it. Yer see, me pal saw them put all de stuff in er bag,and heard yer friend Joe tell yer old man to take en home fer safe keepin. Well, I'll be de safe, and I'll do de keepin.

Mrs P. Then you came here for t hat bag?

Bill. Did'nt ye just hear me say that?

Mrs P. her eyes flashing, eagerly. Suppose he won't give you the ba bag?

Bill. If he's got any brains he'll give it up and say:Thank you.

Mrs P. But I know he won't give it up without fighting for it. It belongs t o an orphan.

Bill. Well, if he's of de fight in kind he'll meet his friend on de golden stairs allright.

Mrs P. in t ones of anguish. You won't kill him?

Bill. If he's killed it's his own fault. He must'nt fight when dere no use.

Mrs P. But he''l fight . I know, he will fight , and you have the weapon to kill.

Bill. That's where he is a fool t o fight. Sleigh bells are heard faint ly, as if they sound came from a distance. Mrs P. makes

an attempt to run to window. He points revelver at her

Bill. Not so fast, me lady.

Mrs P. Oh, that must be my husband. He little dreams, he is coming to his own home to fall into a death trap. Oh, my God, you won't , she wails, you won't you can not be so void of feelingto take the life of all that is near and dear to a wife and baby just for the sake os money. I will give you all I have got in the house though it is not a fortune. But I can't give you more than I have got.

Bill. Now, shut up. You're wastin breath, ye could'nt squeeze a bit o' feeling out o' me ant more than you could squeeze a dollar out of a miser. The bells are heard plainer.

Mrs P. I won't believe that. I know there is a little feeling that you hide behind that mask, or you would silence me to get me out of the way. Oh, please, please, think of your own mot her or perhaps a sister. Would you like to see their only only friend on earth killed before your very eyes?

Bill stands thinking.

Mrs P. a light of hope in her eyes. Ah, you do hesitate, you will go away?

Bill. pulling himself together, Now, look here, if you keep up this gabbing I'll forgit me manners. I should have gagged you in the first place, but I don't like to hurt a woman if I don't have to. Bells are heard plainer.

Mrs P. in agony and terror. My God, he is coming nearer and nearer with not hing to warn him of his fate. She looks at Bill pleadingly, then takes off her rings. Here, among these is my wedding ring, dearer to me than my life, take them, and

here. She takes purse out of pocket. Here is over forty dollars, my savings. Take it, take my clothes off my back, but, oh, in God's name, spare him, spare my husband.

Bill. Giving me a rock fer a mountain eh? Well it don't go. I got ter git t hatbag. I want ter quit this business, and t h at bag is t he quitter. Bells are heard quite near. He goes over t o door, takes out two revolvers. With this one I'll just hit him over t he head, and if his head ain't mushy, I think you'll be able ter doctor him up after I'm off wit h de bag. But I give yer warnin, if yer holler I'll send yer wit h him, for I made up my mind ter git that bag.

Mrs P. t hrows herself at his feet, grasping him around his legs. You must kill me first, for I will not see my husband killed before my very eyes.

Bill, looks at her, You're a brick, you are. I wonder would de old bloke do that fer you. No, I won't hurt you, unless I must

Mrs P. riseswly husband is but a short distance from the house, you can shoot if you like, but I will warn him. She runs over and attempt s t o raise t he window. He points revolver at her

Bill. Open that window and I fire.

Mrs P. eyes wander t o open door, she st aggers forward, gasping. My baby. Oh, no. I can't, I can't. Oh, God, isthere no other way? She suddenly looks up as if a thought had come to her. Yes, yes, t here is a way, there is a way. She runs over to Bill. Listen, there is not a moment to lose. I promise that within ten minutes after my husband has entered with t hat bag, you will have it in your possession.

Bill, H ow?

MrsP. I will give it t o you.

Bill. laughs. Take me for a kid, don't ye?

Mrs P. Don't , oh don't stand t here wasting time. I swear I will give you the bag.You may hide whereveryouwish,where you can hear and see me.I tell you,I will get the bag and give it to you. He stands as if in deep thought . Don't stand there like that. Don't you hear him coming? She t hrows her arms around his neck. I implore you, say yes, please, please, say yes. She looks int o his eyes t hrough his mask. He looks at her, t hen takes a deep breath.

Bill. Well, I will say yes,but not for God's sake, for yours. She drops her arms. He runs over t o draperies.

Mrs P. No, not t here. That is my husband's room, and I want him t o go t here as soon as I can persuade hi t o do so.

Bill. runs t o open door and looks in. The kid. That's good. I'll go in there,I'll see all ye do and hear all ye say,and if you suit ch the kid pays her life for it . He steps into room, t hen puts his head out again. Did ye hear? If you suit chthe kid pays her life for it . He goes in.

Bells are heard at door. She staggers over to window.

Mrs P. He is here, and he is safe. Oh, I could cry out with joy.

Mr P. is heard: Whoa, Prince. Bells cease.

Mrs P. goes to door. Now t o get the bag.

She opens door. Enter Mr P. bag in hand. She kisses him.

Mrs P. I am so glad you are home,dear. I was dreadfully nervous.

Mr P. as she helps him off wit h coat. Why should you be nervous? You are perfectly safe here.

Mrs P. Yes, yes, of course, but then I knew poor Joe must be dead or dying.

Mr P. Yes, poor fellow, hi is dead. He sits down. But after all I t hink he is better off. He suffered so.

Mrs P. Did he suffer to t he last?

Mr P. No, he died very peacefully. Mrs P. is looking at the bag. He spoke to me unt il a moment before his death. You will be surprised t o hear he left you all of Marion's jewels. He said: My poor little Elizabet h is a cripple. She will never wear t hem, so Alice may as well enjoy them. He looks at his wife who is st ill looking at bag. You don't seem pleased Alice. I thought you'd be glad.

Mrs P. No, I am not glad. Hesitating, you see, you see--, they would always remind me of the dead. I would rather not have them.

Mr P. What a foolish child you are. We must all die some day, and when you die, Vivian shall wear them. What are you looking at over t here, Alice?

Mrs P. That bag. You did not leave t he house with a bag.

Mr P. That bag comes from poor Joe. It contains all the papers, money and jewels.

Mrs P. Why did'nt the lawyers take possession of it?

Mr P. The lawyer is out of town. He won't be here until morning.

Mrs P. But were you not afraid of the responsibility?

Mr P. Why should I be afraid, dear?

Mrs P. There--there might be a fire.

Mr P. Well, a fire is of course a demon, but I should fight even a demon for t hat bag.

Mrs P. avoids his stare, walks over to bag and is about to pick it up.

Mr P. Leave the bag t o me, Alice. I'll take good care of it, you may rest assured of t hat.

Mrs P. I'll- I'll put it in t he back room for you, who knows some one might break in during the night. She lisfts the

bag. My, but it is heavy. She is about to walk with it.

Mr P. goes over to her, takes bag from her and places it on chair near table. I a m very tired but I have some work to do. t hat must be done tonight .

Mrs P. in agitat ion. but -but can't you do that work in the morning?

Mr P. You know my motto: Do today what you should do tomorrow.

Mrs P. pleadingly. But I do wish you would postpone your work just t his once.

Mr P. Why are you so anxious for me to postpone my work. it isn't much like you.

Mrs P. not knowing what to say. because-because I am tired. I want to go t o bed.

Mr P. Well, you trot off to bed. You can't wait for me. it may be hours before my work is done.

Mrs P. horrified. Hours? What work have you that will last hours?

Mr P. t akes up bag. I must go through all the papers.

Mrs P. goes over to him, puts arms around his neck. Walter, I can't go to my room alone tonight. I am dreadfully nervous.

Mr P. Why should J oe's death upset you so? I am sure you knew he would'nt last long. Mrs P. is trying t o take bag fr o him.

Mrs P. nervously. Yes, yes. of course, but then death is death, she is still trying t o get bag from him, and it's horrible. So c ome, dear, come to your room. She takes bag fro m his hand.

Mr P. You know I should like to please you, but I really can't let this go till morning. The lawyer may call very early and I want to know full particulars before I give up these papers. He kisses her. Now, be a good girl, go to bed, and I'll hurry as much as possible.

She is about t o take a step towards the child's room when he goes over and takes bag from her.

Mr P. I could'nt very well work wit hout t he bag, the papers aren all in t here. He places bag on table and is about to open it . when Mrs P. rushes over t o him,

Mrs P. No, you sha'nt open t hat bag now, you sha'nt, I am too nervous. Don't ask me why again. I don't know.I am ill. Can't you see I am ill? She is beside h rself with fear.

Mr P. looks at her perplexed. There is something wrong here. Alice what is it?

Mrs P. Nothing. Walter, nothing. You know I would not deceive you. I-I am only nervous, dear,that's all.Believe me,dear, that's all.Oh,go t o bed,dear,please go to bed.Don't work tonight. She looks at him pleadingly

Mr P. looking steadily at her,I repeat there is something wrong t onight.St ands looking at her,then as if a thought had struck him, The child, you have'nt mentioned the child since I came home.He runs t o door of child's room. She runs ahead of him and barrs his entrance.He st artles back when he sees heragainst door.

Mrs P. Y ou can't go in t here,Walter,not now.

Mr P. ast onished.Can't go in t here?Why not?

Mrs P. I can't tell you why. Oh, please don't ask mewhy.I am ddoing what is best for you.Don't stand there looking at me as if I were a wild beast,but go to your room,please,go to your room,or I shall go mad. He still stands looking at her. Won't you please go to your room?

Mr P. And don't you want the bag?

Mrs P. eagerly. Yes,yes give it t o me.

Mr P. To t ake in t o your lover,whom you have hidden in my innocent baby's room. She is horrified. So, that's why you wanted

t he bag.That 's why you wanted me t o go to bed.
You feared your lover would be caught in a trap like a rat.

MrsP. in a choking voice. Walt er, you don't know what you are saying.

Mr P. in commanding t one. Come away from that door. Do you hear me. She sees t he wrath in his eye , and rushes to him and t hrows her arms around him.

Mrs P. Walt er, you must trust me. Why should you doubt me?Have I ever given you any cause t o doubt e, have I ever been anyt hing but a fait hful wife, a loving mother? I beseech you Trust me. I have some t hing hidden in that room, but I swear t o you by t he life of my child,it is not a lover.

Mr P. Women such as you will swear by the life of their flesh and blood. He t hrows her aside and goes t o door.

Mrs P. screams, I warn you, don't go in there.

Mr P. opens door and comes face t o face wit h Bill.

Bill point ing revolver at him. Yer got left, did'nt yer? Mr P. st artles back. Yer what de world calls a gentleman,and I am a t hief. Well, let me tell yer right here, if the thief had a wife like you mothe'd be man enough to trust her. Now sit down. He menaces him with revolver, Mr P. sits down. I came fer t hat bag, and I'd get it if I wanted it, for yer life would'nt be much t o anybody but her. He looks at her. But now I make you a present of yer bag and of yer lifetoo, not for your sake, but for hers..He points to Mrs P. ,then walks to door leading to porch.Mrs P. walks over to him,and holds out her hand. He takes itand looks into her face, saying: If my wife was a woman like you I would'nt be here t onight. He drops her hand,bows head and leaves.

Mr P. goes over to his wife, saying. Alice, can I hope for forgiveness?

Mrs P. I will try to forget the wrong you have done me, but I will always remember "the man with the mask".

Curtain.